

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0255

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PGOV MP
SUBJECT: RAMGOOLAM IS COPING SERIOUSLY WITH DISSIDENCE IN HIS
LABOR PARTY BUT PEOPLE STILL WANT HIM TO STEP DOWN.

REF: PORT LOUIS 189

SUMMARY. THIS TELEGRAM PROVIDES AN UP-DATE TO REFTEL, WHICH
REPORTED ON THE CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE IN PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM'S
CONTINUED LEADERSHIP WHICH HAD DEVELOPED WITHIN HIS LABOR PARTY
DURING HIS ABSENCE ON A TRIP ABROAD. SINCE HIS RETURN ON
FEBRUARY 18 RAMGOOLAM HAS MOVED RAPIDLY AND THUS FAR EFFECTIVELY
TO COPE WITH THE DISSIDENCE IN HIS PARTY. HE HAS MET PRIVATELY
WITH THE DISSIDENT GROUP OF YOUNG DEPUTIES, WHO ARE NOW FIVE IN
NUMBER, AND HAS SET UP A TWELVE-MEMBER "WORKING COMMITTEE" UNDER
HIS OWN CHAIRMANSHIP TO CONSIDER SERIOUSLY AND IN DETAIL THE
DEMANDS OF THE DISSIDENTS FOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENTAL REFORM.
OWING TO THE ABSENCE ABROAD OF A KEY MEMBER, FINANCE MINISTER
RINGADOO, THE COMMITTEE HAS MET ONLY ONCE AND HAS POSTPONED
FURTHER WORK UNTIL LATER IN MARCH WHEN RANGADOO WILL BE BACK.
JOCKEYING BETWEEN AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL AND RINGADOO'S
FACTION CONTINUES, BUT RAMGOOLAM HAS YET TO FACE UP TO THE
PRESSURES THAT HAVE BEEN MOUNTING FOR HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE
PRIME MINISTERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

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1. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM RETURNED TO MAURITIUS ON
FEBRUARY 18 AND HE MOVED RAPIDLY AND THUS FAR SUCCESSFULLY
TO DEAL WITH THE SERIOUS OUTBREAK OF DISSIDENCE THAT
SURFACED PURLICLY DURING HIS ABSENCE ABROAD (REFTEL). HE
HAS MAINTAINED HIS GOOD HUMOR IN PUBLIC AND HAS DEALT WITH
THE SITUATION IN A CALM AND ORDERLY MANNER, BUT HE IS SAID
TO BE DEPRESSED IN PRIVATE AND SOMEWHAT SHOCKED BY THE

SERIOUSNESS OF THE CHALLENGE TO HIS LEADERSHIP (THOUGH HE DOES NOT ADMIT THAT THAT IS WHAT IT IS). IN A MEETING WITH A VISITING AMERICAN AID TEAM EARLIER THIS WEEK HE WAS MORE SUBDUED AND DISTRACTED THAN USUAL AND LESS COMMUNICATIVE.

2. RAMGOOLAM'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION WAS ABORTIVE, FOR THE THREE DISSIDENT YOUNG DEPUTIES BOYCOTTED A FEBRUARY 23 MEETING HE CONVOKED OF THE LABOR PARLIAMENTARY GROUP TO DISCUSS THEIR DEMANDS FOR DRASTIC REFORMS IN THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. RAMGOOLAM THEREUPON ARRANGED TO MEET WITH THE DISSIDENTS PRIVATELY, AND THIS WAS DEEMED TO HAVE BEEN A CONCESSION BY RAM AND A VICTORY BY THE DISSIDENTS. THE DISSIDENT GROUP HAD IN THE MEANTIME GROWN TO FIVE, WITH THE ADDITION OF TWO OTHER YOUNG LABOR DEPUTIES WHO ARE ALSO PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES, AND A COUPLE OF MAVERICK YOUNG POLITICIANS COME OUT IN PUBLIC SUPPORT OF THEIR POSITION AS WELL. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE RIFT WAS UNDERSCORED BY A PUBLIC EXCHANGE OF BITTER REMARKS BY PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL JAGATSINGH, WHO ACCUSED THE DISSIDENTS OF WANTING TO OUST RAMGOOLAM FROM THE LEADERSHIP, AND BY THE YOUNG TURKS, WHO INSISTED THEY ARE LOYAL TO RAM WHILE IMPLYING THAT IT IS TYPES LIKE JAGATSINGH THAT THEY WANT TO PURGE FROM THE PARTY.

3. RAMGOOLAM'S PRIVATE MEETING WITH THE YOUNG TURKS ON FEBRUARY 25 WENT SMOOTHLY, AND THE OUTCOME WAS THE CREATION OF A TWELVE-MEMBER "WORKING COMMITTEE" TO EXAMINE THE CONFIDENTIAL

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COMPLAINTS AND DEMANDS OF THE DISSIDENTS IN DETAIL. BOTH SIDES SEEMED SATISFIED WITH THIS RESULT. RAMGOOLAM HIMSELF IS TO CHAIR THE COMMITTEE, AND ALL FIVE DISSIDENTS WILL BE MEMBERS, ALONG WITH AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL AND FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO, THE PRINCIPAL CONTENDERS FOR THE SUCCESSION TO RAMGOOLAM. THE OTHER MEMBERS ARE: MINISTER OF PLANNING GHURBURRUN, WHO WOULD LIKE TO SUCCEED RAMGOOLAM; TWO OF RAM'S CRONIES, SOCIAL SECURITY MINISTER BADRY AND PARTY WHIP CHETTIAR; AND JAMES BURTY DAVID, PRESIDENT OF THE PARTY AND ONE OF THE TARGETS OF THE DISSIDENTS. SIGNIFICANTLY, PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL JAGATSINGH, WHOSE OUSTER THE DISSIDENTS HAVE DEMANDED, WAS LEFT OFF THE COMMITTEE.

4. THE WORKING COMMITTEE HELD ITS FIRST MEETING ON FEBRUARY 28, WITH RINGADOO ABSENT, AS HE LEFT ON AN OFFICIAL MISSION TO INDIA ON THE DAY THAT RAMGOOLAM RETURNED TO MAURITIUS. BOOLELL, ACTING AS SPOKESMAN FOR THE WORKING GROUP, TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE TWO-HOUR MEETING WAS HARMONIOUS, INTERNAL PARTY PROBLEMS WOULD BE DISCUSSED WITHIN THE FAMILY AND SETTLED IN A SPIRIT OF CONCILIATION, AND THE PARTY WOULD EMERGE STRONGER THAN EVER. THE NEXT MEETING WAS POSTPONED UNTIL AFTER THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE CEREMONIES ON MARCH 12, WHEN RINGADOO

WILL BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE. (IT IS OBVIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO SETTLE THESE DEEP-SEATED DIFFERENCES IN HIS ABSENCE, AS HE HEADS A PARTY FACTION WHICH IS APPARENTLY AS STRONG AS BOOLELL'S.) SIGNIFICANTLY, BOOLELL WAS SURROUNDED BY THE FIVE DISSIDENTS WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE PRESS, SEEMING TO CONFIRM THAT HE IS BEHIND THEIR INITIATIVE, OR AT LEAST FULLY SUPPORTS IT, AND IS TRYING TO CAPITALIZE ON IT TO ENHANCE HIS POSITION FOR THE SUCCESSION FIGHT.

5. FOR THE MOMENT THE DISSIDENTS APPEAR TO BE WILLING TO BIDE THEIR TIME, AS THE PARTY LEADERSHIP HAS TAKEN THEIR DEMANDS SERIOUSLY, IS EXAMINING THEM AND APPEARS PREPARED TO ACT ON THEM. THE YOUNG TURKS SET A DEADLINE OF MARCH 31, BUT IF THERE IS MOVEMENT IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION THEY WILL PROBABLY BE PATIENT. THEY CONTINUALLY DECLARE THEIR LOYALTY TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTY AND TO RAMGOOLAM PERSONALLY AND SEEM INTENT ON TRYING TO REFORM THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT FROM WITHIN WHILE AVOIDING CAUSING THEIR DOWNFALL AND DESTRUCTION.

6. FOR HIS PARTY RAMGOOLAM HAS RECOGNIZED THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION AND IS APPROACHING IT IN A CONCILIATORY MANNER RATHER THAN WITH HIS MORE CHARACTERISTIC AUTHORITARIANISM. THE LABOR PARTY COULD WELL EMERGE MUCH STRONGER FROM THIS EXERCISE, IF THE REFORMS DEMANDED BY THE YOUNG TURKS ARE CARRIED OUT, FOR THESE REFORMS GO TO THE HEART OF THE WIDESPREAD COMPLAINTS AND CRITICISMS THAT HAVE BEEN THE CAUSE OF THE PARTY'S AND GOVERNMENT'S UNPOPULARITY. WHETHER SOME OF THE MORE DRASTIC CHANGES -- SUCH AS THE REMOVAL OF UNPOPULAR CABINET MINISTERS AND FOREIGN EXPERTS AND ADVISERS -- CAN BE ACCEPTED BY RAMGOOLAM REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT HE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ATTEMPTING TO BUY OFF THE DISSIDENTS WITH WINDOW-DRESSING CHANGES.

7. THE PROBLEM OF THE SUCCESSION TO RAMGOOLAM REMAINS AND SO FAR HAS NOT BEEN TOUCHED, SO FAR AS WE KNOW. MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING SOME OF HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATES, BELIEVE IT IS TIME FOR THE P.M. TO STEP DOWN AND THEY ARE HOPING THAT THIS INTRA-PARTY CRISIS WILL BRING HOME TO HIM A REALIZATION OF THE NEED FOR FRESH LEADERSHIP. BUT RAM DOES NOT SEEM INCLINED TO STEP DOWN VOLUNTARILY, AND NO ONE HAS THE COURAGE OR THE AUDACITY TO TELL HIM WHAT HE REALLY OUGHT TO DO, WHICH IS TO PREPARE FOR THE SUCCESSION NOW AND IN A WAY THAT WILL ENSURE THE MAINTENANCE OF HIS PARTY IN POWER AND A CONTINUATION OF THE MODERATE POLICIES HE BELIEVES ARE BEST FOR MAURITIUS.

KEELEY

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